



(U//FOUO) CBRN: How You Can Help Prevent the Unthinkable

FROM: Charlie Meals
SIGINT Deputy Director
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(S//REL) One of our biggest concerns today is **the threat of terrorists acquiring and using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons**, either in the U.S. or abroad. The nightmare scenario fictionalized in movies and books is that of terrorists unleashing some type of weapon of mass destruction--nuclear or biological are popular choices--on the U.S. homeland, wreaking mass casualties or devastation.

(S//REL) Good for a movie draw or summer read, but what is the likelihood of such an event occurring? One would hope it is minimal, but the nature of the threat is nonetheless very real (examples include Aum Shinrikyo's attack using sarin on a Tokyo subway in 1995 or the U.S. anthrax mailings in 2001). Al-Qa'ida and other terrorist organizations have demonstrated through open declarations, and by actions, the intent to obtain CBRN weapons for spectacular attacks.



(U) CBRN fire fighters practice a rescue operation in Italy (Reuters)

(S//SI) What can we do about it? SIGINT needs to provide the earliest possible actionable warning information of attempts to acquire or use CBRN weapons. It is not good enough to detect a CBRN attack as it is about to occur -- we must succeed in identifying and disrupting the threats early in the planning stages. The CBRN mission is not limited to one production center. While typically described as the nexus between the Counterterrorism (CT) and Combating Proliferation (CP) missions, in reality it touches on a multitude of other mission areas.

(U) Think about the *Sum of All Fears* scenario -- a lost Israeli nuclear weapon is found in the Egyptian desert and subsequently smuggled to Russia. There, some Russian nuclear scientists, under the watchful eye of crooked Russian political or crime figures, assemble a nuclear device, which is then placed in the cargo hold of a commercial freighter. The cargo is delivered to Baltimore harbor where terrorists subsequently detonate the weapon.

(S//SI) Terrorists handled the planning and the execution/employment stages, but what about the variety of other actors who helped finance, acquire, develop, assemble, and transport the weapon? From a SIGINT perspective, many offices -- such as those working the Middle East, organized crime/illicit networks, Russian government, Russian scientific or nuclear industry, counter intelligence, travel, follow-the-money, and high interest cargoes - could potentially play a role in foiling this plot. Further, neither CT nor CP would likely have been first to recognize the nefarious activities.

(S//SI) **If we're to succeed, everyone in the SIGINT production chain needs to be aware of how their target information could potentially contribute to this critical mission** --a "neighborhood watch" for CBRN, if you will. Don't count on an alert to get engaged, you are our first line of defense!

(S//SI) How can you help prevent a CBRN attack? Take the time to learn more about CBRN, be cognizant of potentially related activities, and ask questions of the CBRN experts if you aren't sure! Visit the [CBRN webpage](#) (go CBRN) to find out more about CBRN and whom to contact. Look for more to come about the NSA "neighborhood CBRN watch" program!

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